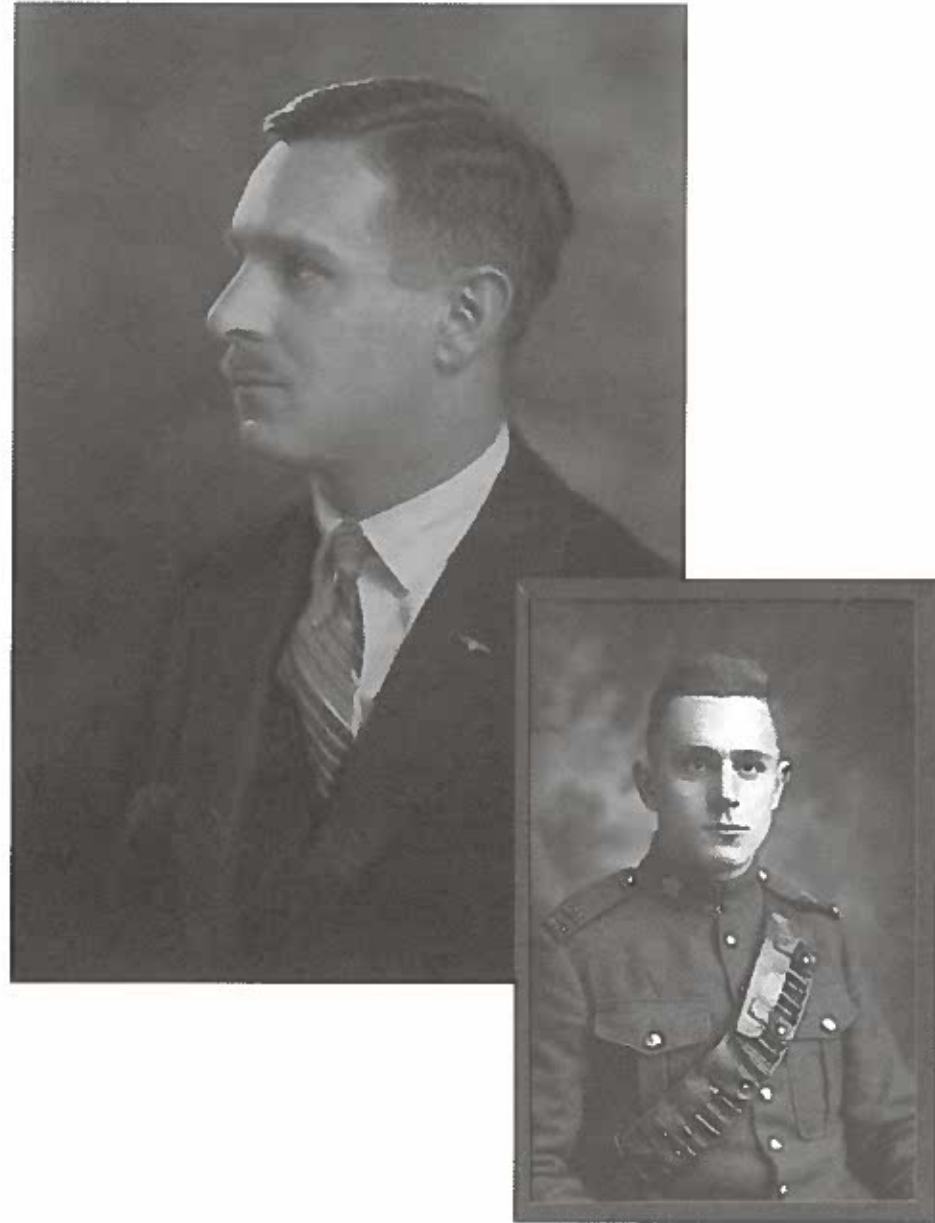


HAROLD ANTHONY “DOC” OAKS

Business



*Inducted: 2007
Years at GCI & VS:
1909 - 1913*

Harold Anthony “Doc” Oaks (Ochs) was born in Hespeler November 12th, 1896. He received his elementary education in Hespeler and Preston. Harold attended Galt Collegiate Institute graduating in 1913. Harold enrolled in 1914 at the University of Toronto in an Arts course (Economics) and completed his first year.

In the summer of 1915, he joined the Canadian Signal Corps and went overseas that same year as a dispatch rider. He was sent to France in March 1916 and posted to the 1st Canadian Division. Shortly after the battle of Vimy Ridge he was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). He learned to fly Maurice Farman Short Horns, Bleriot Experimental’s and Bristol Fighters. He returned to France with the 48th Squadron of the RFC. He served with the Royal Air Force when it was formed on April 1st, 1918 and was wounded in action. He was commissioned as a Captain on July 1st 1918. Captain Oaks was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for gallantry under fire in November 1918 and credited with eleven enemy aircraft destroyed.

The name Harold Oaks is engraved on the marble monument at the front entrance to GCI. This lists the staff and students of GCI who served in the First World War. Early in 1915, due to anti-German sentiment, Dr Anthony Oaks, the father of Doc Oaks, changed the family name from Ochs to Oaks for himself and his seven children .

Following the war, in 1922, he earned his Bachelor of Science in mining from the University of Toronto, with his thesis on the theory of mining prospecting from the air. He came back from the war with the intention of doing something that would enable him to continue to fly. Mr. Oaks worked for Hollinger Mines Limited in exploration, which he soon quit because it lacked excitement. He was easily persuaded to try for a job at Ontario Provincial Air Service, located at Sault St Marie. He received his Commercial Pilots Certificate on July 16th, 1924 and flew forest air patrols in north western Ontario out of Sioux Lookout for two summers. Mr. Oaks was now able to indulge in his two favourite occupations, flying and prospecting.

In 1925, with a partner, Doc Oaks staked a claim during the Red Lake gold rush. They soon realized the real money in prospecting was to be made in transportation. They sold their claim and formed Patricia Airways and Exploration Company to fly supplies, mail and passengers to remote mining sites in northern Ontario. In 1926, he approached James Richardson in Winnipeg and persuaded Mr. Richardson to finance Western Canada Airlines with Doc Oaks as general manager.

Doc Oaks pioneered winter flights and designed and manufactured “nose hangers”. With these hangers, peculiar to Canada, a fire could be built under the engine to overcome the problem of the oil freezing overnight. Under the direction of Doc Oaks a new type of aircraft ski was designed

and built by the Elliott Brothers of Sioux Lookout. Admiral Richard Byrd used this type of ski on his three Antarctic Expeditions. Through Doc Oaks’ energy and initiative, many isolated communities and mining fields became more easily accessible and travel in both summer and winter in Northern Canada was revolutionized. The Trans Canada (McKee) Trophy was awarded in its first year (1927) to Mr. Oaks in recognition of his innovations including the portable nose hangar, more reliable skis and a large winter transport of goods to Fort Churchill on Hudson Bay.

Doc Oaks left Western Canada airlines in 1928 to found Northern Aerial Mineral Exploration (NAME) financed mainly by James Richardson of Winnipeg. This company was formed to fulfill his wish to use the airplane for mineral exploration. NAME operated till 1931.

Oaks Airway Limited was formed by Doc Oaks in 1931 to transport passengers and freight in the north , and he continued to conduct mining exploration out of Sioux Lookout until 1935. He moved his exploration work to Port Arthur, where the Geralton mining area was opening up. During the second world war he consulted with Clark Ruse Aircraft Company on flying and testing airplanes. Mr. Oaks continued his interests in flying and mineral exploration into the 1950’s as a mining consultant and mining stock analyst.

Today the use of airborne scintillometers and magnetometers to explore and locate radio-active and other mineral bodies is common place and practical, in part due to his foresight and pioneering efforts. These early efforts of Mr. Oaks and his interest in the mining industry have helped add substantially to Canada’s industrial progress.

Captain Harold “Doc” Oaks, D.F.C., B.A. Sc., P. Eng., M.E.I.C. died on July 21st, 1968 at the age of 71. He was named to Canada’s Aviation Hall of Fame in 1974, with the following citation: “ The professional daring of his aerial expeditions into uncharted regions led others of his breed to colonize the north and bring outstanding benefits to Canadian aviation”. He was a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, Companion of the Order of Flight, member of the Waterloo County Hall of Fame, and was inducted into the City of Cambridge Hall of Fame in 2007. Early bush flying is heavily marked by the activities of Doc Oaks. As well as the entry into the Aviation Hall of Fame in Edmonton,, the Winnipeg Airport museum has a plaque erected for him and he is noted at the Bush Pilots Museum in Sault St Marie, the Red Lake Museum and on a plaque for the bush pilots of Sioux Lookout and Hudson, erected by the Province of Ontario in Hudson Ont., and he was awarded the Polaris medal in 1973, issued by the Territory of Yukon to early pilots of the Territories.

